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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by the American Association of University Women, the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Girls Learn International, Inc., The Grail, the International Council of Jewish Women, the International Federation for Home Economics, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, the International Movement for Fraternal Union among Races and Peoples, the International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, the Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Inc., the Pan Pacific and Southeast Asia Women's Association, Partnership for Global Justice, Passionists International, School Sisters of Notre Dame, the Sisters of Charity Federation, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, the Susila Dharma International Association, the Society for the

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Psychological Study of Social Issues, the League of Women Voters of the United States, the Salvation Army, To Love Children Educational Foundation International Inc., VIVAT International and the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

Statement

Promises made

We reaffirm the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including section L, whereby Governments committed themselves to eliminating discrimination against girls; increasing awareness of their needs and potential; providing equal opportunities in education and training; promoting their participation in social, economic and political life; and recognizing that the advancement of women is not sustainable without attention to the rights of girls.

Girls' rights to protection and enjoyment of human rights are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Moreover, in the document entitled "A World fit for children", Governments declared they were "determined to eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child throughout her life cycle and to provide special attention to her needs in order to promote and protect all her human rights".[1]

The Commission on the Status of Women has repeatedly sought to end discrimination and violence against girls. The fifty-fourth session of the Commission offers a unique opportunity for Member States to review progress and ensure all girls the full enjoyment of their human rights.

Promises broken

After decades of promises, girls are still denied their political, economic, social and cultural rights and subjected to cultural and legally sanctioned behaviours that present a grave risk to their physical, psychological, spiritual, social and emotional development. If we are serious about human rights, we must acknowledge the barriers to equality that hold girls back and act to end discrimination and violence against them.

Discrimination against the girl child

Research indicates that girls begin life from a position of disadvantage that continues throughout their lives. One third are not registered at birth.[2] Countless numbers are forced into early marriage, limiting their freedom, ending their education and increasing their risk of domestic violence and death due to early pregnancy.[3] As a result of complications in childbirth or pregnancy, 70,000 girls die annually.[4] Many more experience serious incapacitating childbirth injuries.[5] Girls are infected by HIV/AIDS at disproportionately high rates; three quarters of the 15 to 24-year-olds infected with HIV are young women and girls.[6] Furthermore, discriminatory inheritance laws and practices condemn many to poverty.[7]

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[1] General Assembly resolution S-27-2, annex.

[2] Plan (2009), *Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls 2009*, p. 38.

[3] Plan (2009), p. 51.

[4] UNICEF (2009), *State of the World's Children 2009*, p. 14.

[5] UNFPA, www.unfpa.org/mothers/fistula.htm.

[6] Plan (2007), *Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls 2007*, p. 8.

[7] Plan (2009), p. 201.

Educating girls is often viewed as a wasted investment. Thus, girls are less likely than boys to be enrolled in school and more likely to remain illiterate.[8] For every 100 boys only 94 girls start school; girls are also more likely to drop out.[9] Even when girls are enrolled, discriminatory attitudes prevail. School curricula often reinforce prevailing gender stereotypes and girls are subjected to harassment and abuse by classmates and teachers. Consequently, girls are often unprepared and, therefore, vulnerable to social, economic and health problems.

Violence and economic exploitation

Approximately 218 million children worldwide, ages 5 to 17, engage in some form of child labour. Of these, 126 million engage in illegal, hazardous or exploitative child labour.[10]

Approximately 8 million children are engaged in the "worst forms of child labour",[11] defined as child trafficking, debt bondage and forced labour, the forced recruitment of children in armed conflict; child prostitution and child pornography; the use of children in illicit activities, such as in the production and trafficking of drugs; and any form of work that can harm children.[12]

Two million girls, ages 5 to 15, are initiated into the commercial sex industry annually.[13] Sex trafficking in girls is fuelled by gender inequality; unrelenting demand factors; female poverty; myths and stereotypes; and financial and political crises. Girls seeking to improve their lives through employment, migration or other opportunities are often exploited by traffickers and pimps and treated as commodities to be bought, sold and repeatedly raped by the countless buyers they are required to "service".

Negative cultural attitudes and practices

Cultural norms, gender roles and gender stereotypes are at the root of gender inequality.[14] Gender stereotypes and the undervalued social roles associated with the marginalized status of women heighten the vulnerability of girls.

Cultural preference for sons has resulted in over 100 million missing girls due to female foeticide, infanticide, malnutrition and neglect.[15] Cultural attitudes and practices have also resulted in the harmful genital cutting of more than 70 million girls and women, violating their human rights and physical and psychological integrity.[16]

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[8] Plan (2007), p. 54.

[9] Plan (2009), p. 69.

[10] ILO-IPEC (2006) *The end of child labour: Within reach*, Geneva: International Labour Office, p. xi.

[11] ILO-IPEC (2002) *Every child counts: New global estimates on child labour*, Geneva: International Labour Office.

[12] ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour.

[13] Y. Rafferty (2007), "Children for sale: child trafficking in Southeast Asia", *Child Abuse Review*, vol. 16, pp. 401-422.

[14] P. O'Reilly (2001), "Learning to be a girl", *Educating Young Adolescent Girls* (P. O'Reilly, E. P. Penn, & K. de Marrais, eds.), NJ: Erlbaum, pp. 11- 28.

[15] Plan (2009), p. 37.

[16] UNICEF (2009), *Progress for Children*, p. 12.

Recommendations

Discrimination and violence against girls will end when Governments and their citizens address gender inequality.

End discrimination

- Abolish laws that support discrimination against girls, including inheritance, dowry and marriage laws, and provide for birth registration.
- Fund programmes to combat discrimination based on gender, age, race, ethnicity, social status, religion, disability, migrant or refugee status.
- Undertake systematic reform of education creating rights-based, gender-sensitive curricula, infrastructure and pedagogy designed to promote equality and the rights of all girls to free education.
- Ensure that business opportunities are fair and equitable and equip girls with economic tools to achieve full economic empowerment.
- Launch public campaigns to eliminate discrimination based on the notion of girls' inferiority and support positive attitudes and behaviours that encourage girls' full partnership in the household and public spheres. Such campaigns must target the media and address the role of men and boys in establishing gender equality and emphasize the societal benefits of girls' empowerment.
- Collect, analyse and disseminate data disaggregated by sex, age, socio-economic status, race and ethnicity in order to create an inclusive gender perspective for planning, implementation and monitoring of government programmes and for benchmarking across nations and communities.

Protect girls

- Develop gender-responsive budgeting that explicitly allocates monies for programmes to end violence against girls, including genital cutting, incest, prenatal sex selection, infanticide, and trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation; education and training; and physical and mental health.
- Develop legislation that incorporates the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.
- Sign, ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.
- Invite the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) working in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to identify best practices across the globe that decriminalize girls in prostitution and prosecute perpetrators.
- Provide gender-sensitive, community-based reintegration programmes for children who have been trafficked, commercially exploited or victimized in armed conflict.

Empower girls

- Remove all barriers to education for girls including school fees, discriminatory attitudes and curricula and ensure their safety. Education is the right of every girl and the key to transforming her life and the life of her community.
- Increase girls' competence through education and training that includes social, political and economic empowerment to prepare them for their critical roles in their families and communities.
- Promote the participation, visibility and empowerment of girls by creating safe spaces for them to speak and to obtain assistance. The skills, ideas and energy of all girls, especially those from disadvantaged groups, are vital for sustainable development.
- Strengthen the role of civil society, especially girls' organizations, in tackling gender stereotypes and empowering girls to participate more fully in their families and communities.
- Partner with families and communities to address the needs of girls heading households and children without parental care, including in the context of the HIV/AIDS, to ensure that programmes are holistic and include measures to increase men and boys' responsibility for caregiving.
- Monitor and evaluate macroeconomic policies and social spending to ensure that girls' needs are addressed.